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Faith: Restoring Us to God

Before You Begin (optional)

- ☐ Read “Expansion 3: Faith—A Biblical Introduction to This Value” in the *CMEP*

Introduction

Before we get started, let’s talk . . .

Discussion

Describe a time when God really ministered to you personally while in the context of a small group of believers? What were you doing? What happened? What do you think made it so powerful?

We, the church, exist in the *Presence* of God. We are the *Bride* of Christ, created and redeemed to enjoy intimate relationship with Him. This value presses our church *upwards* in love for Him.

Consider 1 Corinthians 8:6—“For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”

We were created for Him—to know Him, love Him, obey Him, worship Him. We once had been exiled from Him in our sin, but through Christ we have been brought back.

We value Faith in this church.

There are a number ways a Home Group can pursue this value. Here are a few to get you started: (1) Devote Yourself to the Scriptures; (2) Say Your Prayers; and (3) Behold Him in the Breaking.

1. Devote Yourself to the Scriptures

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the *word* of Christ” (Rom 10:17). It is through God’s word and Spirit that we are brought back into His presence and renewed in His image. Because of this, each group gives priority to spending time in the Scriptures.

This can take on numerous forms:

- You might study a book of the Bible doing your own research and preparation.

- You might focus on either a book of the Bible or some other topic (i.e. evangelism, marriage, sanctification, etc.) by going through material prepared by another author/teacher.¹
- You might decide to go through the latest sermons to help your group wrestle with, digest, and apply what's been coming from the pulpit on Sundays.²
- You might have something else that God puts on your heart!

There is much freedom here. We only ask that you get your initial plan and any subsequent changes approved by the Elders. If needed, they would also love to help guide you in the way of good group studies, books, commentaries, Bible study helps, etc. Do not hesitate to reach out!

The DNA Method

According to the Bible, one of the ultimate aims of any time spent with God in His Word is life transformation, or what we might call "image renewal." God is in the business of restoring what we have marred, of resurrecting what we have killed, of renewing us in His own image. Consider the following as God describes His own goal in redeeming us:

- "[T]hose whom he foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*" (Rom 8:29).
- "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also *bear the image of the man of heaven*" (1 Cor 15:49).
- "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being *renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*" (Col 3:9-10).
- "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed into the same image* from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

As we come to know God, we come to love Him. And as we come to love Him we come to look more and more like Him as well. Image renewal. As a Home Group Leader, this will be one of your chief aims, because it is also God's.

To help you forward in this, let me introduce you to what I call the DNA Method of Bible study. Each letter in the acronym provides you with a necessary next step, while the acronym as a whole keeps before you the fact that all of this is intended to transform you in Christ at the most basic, even genetic, level. Children of the devil, in Christ, become children of the living God—sons and daughters growing in the likeness of their heavenly Father. We now have His DNA!

The tables below give a basic sense of each step and provide you with questions you can ask yourself and your group as you approach God in His Word.³

¹ For help here, check out "Mercy Hill's Recommended Resources" page online at mercyhillchurch.org. See also "Appendix 1: How to Facilitate a Book Discussion."

² For help with this, see "Appendix 2: How to Facilitate a Sermon Discussion."

³ It should be noted that, while I am presenting this method here particularly with reference to studying the Bible, the same basic steps inform the approach to any book, sermon, video series, etc. that your group might be going through. You first look to understand the author/speaker and make sure you see how it all connects to Jesus and the gospel (Discover); then you wrestle with these things in your heart through repentance and faith, asking Jesus for help (Nurture); and, finally, you look for specific ways these things might work out in your given situation by Spirit's power (Apply).

DISCOVER CHRIST	
Critical Question:	What Do You See?
Critical Faculty:	Head
Critical Dynamic:	Come & See (John 1:43; 46)
Critical Resource:	ESV Study Bible
Critical Path:	<i>What do you see in this text?⁴ What questions do you have? What answers can you find? What is God revealing to you here—about himself, about yourself? Is there an attribute to adore, a truth to trust, a promise to hope in, a command to obey, a warning to heed, an example to follow (choose one)? How does what he is revealing here connect to what he has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus? Every verse in Scripture becomes good news when run through the cross of Christ.⁵ Let's preach the good news to ourselves once more.</i>

NURTURE CHRIST	
Critical Question:	What Do You Believe?
Critical Faculty:	Heart
Critical Dynamic:	Repent & Believe (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21)
Critical Resource:	Journal
Critical Path:	<i>Do you believe the things God is revealing to you in this text? If there's an attribute, are you adoring? If there's a truth, are you trusting? If there's a promise, are you hoping? If there's a command, are you obeying? If there's a warning, are you heeding? If there's an example, are you following? Why or why not? What's in the way? How are these things being tested in what you are currently facing? How can Jesus come to your rescue? Let's make the good confession once more.</i>

⁴ For this step, let me encourage you to slow down! There is so much more in each verse than you think. Read once. Then read again. What do you see? Make note of words, phrases, propositions, questions, etc. What does it mean? If it's narrative, analyze the plotline. If it's discourse, analyze the logic. Read in light of the concentric circles of context (section, chapter, book, author, testament, canon). Research the historical background. Make note of any cross-references. Utilize lexicons, concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, etc.

⁵ For help with this, see "Appendix 4: The Hub Diagram." You may also want to read this article by Vern Poythress: "Overview of the Bible: A Survey of the History of Salvation" (<https://frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2008Overview.pdf>).

APPLY CHRIST	
Critical Question:	What Do You Do?
Critical Faculty:	Hand
Critical Dynamic:	Go & Do (Luke 10:37; James 1:22)
Critical Resource:	Day Planner
Critical Path:	<i>What would this text look like walking out into the details of your life? Think again about what you are currently facing. If you adored, trusted, hoped in, obeyed, heeded, followed, how would it change your next 24 hours? Each day has enough trouble of its own. If this word from God can touch the next few hours, it will start to touch your life as a whole. Identify one thing you can do to apply this. Who else in your life (believer/unbeliever) might need to hear this? Let's bear the good fruit once more.</i>

Discussion

Pick a section of Scripture (maybe something you'll be reading next in your devotions) and let's actually walk through the DNA method together!

Beware of Personal Bents

It is important to realize that every member in your group (including you) will find themselves personally bent towards one of these steps in the DNA process more than others.

- Some will overemphasize *Discovery* (intellectualism). They like systematic theology, word studies, apologetics, and "friendly" debates. But they don't seem to be moved by what they know—neither in love for God nor in their love for others. These individuals need to be gently reminded that our knowledge of the Scriptures is always meant to lead to deeper love for God and neighbor.
- Some will overemphasize *Nurture* (sentimentalism). They love to talk about the heart—how they're feeling, what they're going through, what a text "means to them"—but they have little patience for doing the hard work of biblical exposition and show little interest in actually growing in godliness. These individuals need to be gently reminded that our hearts are meant to be engaged by and conformed to God's word and that all of this is meant to lead to a life of practical obedience.
- Some will overemphasize *Application* (activism). They are weary of all the reading and praying and want to get on with the doing already. These individuals need be gently reminded that all true activism is grounded in and motivated by faith in God's word and the gospel.

Discussion

As an example of the foolishness these sort of overemphases inevitably lead to, let's check out the humorous (but not-so-humorous!) video below . . .

- ☐ **Watch "How NOT to Make Disciples" by Francis Chan**
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KIA-DGx_3Y)

In contradistinction from the various extremes, below is an example of what the DNA Method might look like when kept in balance . . .

- ☐ **Watch "What God Can Do in Daily Devotions" by John Piper**
(<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-to-find-gold-in-god-s-word/excerpts/what-god-can-do-in-daily-devotions>)
- *Have you personally experienced something like the full outworking of this method before? When's the last time God's word had this kind of effect on you? Explain.*
 - *Which step in this method are you personally bent towards? How will you try to compensate for this as you lead a Home Group?*
 - *How will you attempt redirect the various personal bents mentioned above? Have you faced these kinds of individuals before? What helps? What doesn't? Why does this matter?*
 - *With regard to leading group discussion in general, let me encourage you to be on the lookout for what I call "Steamrollers" and "Stonewallers". The Steamroller needs to be gently redirected and reminded of the needs of the whole group. The Stonewaller needs to be gently probed and encouraged to share their own thoughts and heart if they're willing. How do you think you will approach these two different types of people?*

2. Say Your Prayers

Prayer is the breath of the Christian life. It is the lifeline between Creator and creature, between Redeemer and redeemed. It is talking with God, the One for whom we exist. It is a most heavenly activity.

And yet prayer is hard. And in groups it is often awkward, stilted, and cold—fraught with clichés, strange silences, and superficial intercessions. We often enter in with great expectation but exit feeling a bit confused and letdown.

But this doesn't have to be so! Prayer in a Home Group setting is especially important. It is in contexts like these that people often first face the frightening prospect of praying out loud. It is in contexts like these that people can begin to experience the joy of putting words to their inner world and speaking them bravely to one another and to the God who hears. It is in contexts like these that people can be encouraged and equipped to grow in their calling as royal priests, interceding before God for others. It is in contexts like these that people can really learn to pray.

But such things require good leadership. And good leadership requires good training (see the homework assigned below).

Homework

☐ **Listen to “Modeling Grace through Prayer Requests” by David Powlison**

(<https://www.ccef.org/resources/podcast/modeling-grace-through-prayer-requests>)

- *Identify one thing from this lecture that spoke to you personally. How will the material Powlison presents here influence the way you approach prayer in your Home Group?*
- *As a suggestion, consider the “outside-in” rule when taking prayer requests. Often people’s requests will gravitate towards the outside circumstances of their lives (i.e. work, health, finances, etc.). While Jesus cares deeply for these external issues, He cares even more about the person’s heart and how they are interacting with God concerning these things. It is a good habit to always at least consider asking a follow-up question to each prayer request, gently moving towards the heart of the person. For example, a man might share a request: “Please pray for my work. There’s a deadline coming up next week for a big project I’m working on.” You might follow up by saying: “That sounds stressful. What is it that you are working on? How are you feeling about this? Do you feel like God is with you in it, or are you feeling alone and stressed?” Do you see how that just took the request to a much deeper level? At this point you or your group members might have Scripture coming to mind to encourage this man. Feel free to share! Then pray—for both the outside circumstance and the inside matters of his heart before God!*
- *As another suggestion, consider the “Hot Seat”. A deep-dive focusing in on one person. Caution: Do not force or peer-pressure a person into this. Give them the freedom to decline. Avoid pushing, pulling, or shaming. Even if they don’t feel comfortable sharing much, you can still lay hands on them, pray, give thanks, ask God to give you promises for them, etc.*

3. Behold Him in the Breaking

One thing you might consider is taking communion with your Home Group. The Lord’s Supper is a “sermon for the senses.” It takes the gospel that is often only audible to us and makes it something we can see, touch, taste, and experience. As such, it often helps get the gospel “in us” in ways mere words cannot.

An example of what this might look like can be found in the following excerpt from Jeff Vanderstelt’s book *Gospel Fluency*:

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he shared the Passover meal with his disciples. That meal commemorated the night when God struck down every firstborn son of Egypt while protecting his people from the same fate. Their protection came through the Passover lambs that were sacrificed and eaten inside homes where the doorposts had been covered with the lambs’ blood. This was the final straw for Pharaoh, and he finally let God’s people go. Ever after, the Passover was a remembrance meal of God’s redemption of Israel out of slavery.

At his last meal with his disciples before his death, Jesus showed how every Passover meal had pointed to him. And at this meal, Jesus changed the Passover to the Lord's Supper as his meal. It became a meal at which we remember how he redeemed us out of slavery to sin and Satan by becoming the true and better sacrificial Lamb of God for us.

Jesus picked up the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying: "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

The church where I presently serve remembers Jesus' death every Sunday in our music, in our preaching, and through the meal. In our desire to see our people grow in gospel fluency, we made space in our schedule, as well as in our facility, for them to take the bread and cup together in a meaningful way. We usually set up our time of remembrance following the preaching of a gospel-centered message. We encourage people to go and pick up some bread, dip it in the cup, and get into a circle with their friends, family members, or missional-community members. We encourage them to speak the gospel to one another through the elements, often in light of the message they have just heard. For example, when I taught on the importance of silence and solitude, people took the bread and reminded one another that in his body, Jesus was all alone on the cross and was silent before his accusers. His blood (the cup) was shed for us so that we can sit in silence and not hear a condemning word spoken over us. Instead, we hear words of loving acceptance from our heavenly Father. In this way, our people get to practice sharing the gospel with one another in a variety of ways every week and then grow in praying it together as well.

Paul said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). We should remember Jesus regularly with *the* meal and practice proclaiming his death to one another through it.

Another helpful practice for both remembrance and growth in gospel proclamation is to speak the gospel through the elements to one another's needs, hurts, and longings in small-group gatherings or missional-community meetings.

I first tried this during a missional-community gathering at our home in January several years ago. I explained to our group that I wanted each of them to share something they were struggling with; a desire they had that was yet to be met; or doubts or fears they might be experiencing. Then one of us would take the bread and the cup, and speak the truths of Jesus' body given and blood shed for us to the need.

I volunteered to start.

I shared: "I'm pretty discouraged right now. This past year was not what I had hoped. I feel as if our church wasn't as fruitful this year as I wanted. I'm discouraged about my leadership and some ways in which I believe I've failed."

Randy jumped forward, grabbed the bread and the cup, and began to encourage and exhort me: "Jeff, I want to remind you that you don't build the church. Jesus does. And your righteousness is not based on your own performance, but on Jesus' performance for you. It doesn't matter how well or how poorly you did."

Then, as he held up first the bread and then the cup, he went on to say: "Jesus' life was given for you. His body of righteousness was sacrificed for you. And he shed his blood for you. Every sin you've committed, every way in which you fell short, was paid for. You are forgiven for making this about you and making it dependent on you. Receive his body and blood for you. Receive his grace!"

I took the bread and cup, ate and drank, and remembered. It was good news to me!

Then Nikki spoke up: “You kids are all so young. Look at you! Here you are at the beginning of your adult lives and you know Jesus. It took me until I was in my seventies to finally come to Jesus. I don’t know why it took me so long. I have so many regrets. So many things I wish were different. Don’t waste your lives! You have your whole life to live for Jesus. I have so little left.”

One of the women grabbed the bread and the cup, then began to address Nikki: “Nikki, it is true. We have many more years to love and serve Jesus. It is true that you spent most of your life without him. But you can be certain he was there. And he is the Redeemer. He’s *your* Redeemer. He takes the years that you believe you wasted and redeems them all back as though none of them is gone. He replenishes what was lost with his own life.

“You have the righteousness of Christ,” she said, holding up the bread, “in exchange for your life of sin. He bought all the wasted years back for you with his life and death. And besides, your life is a testimony, a story of his grace. And he poured out his blood,” she added, holding up the cup, “for the forgiveness of your sins. No more regrets, Nikki! No more. You are forgiven and cleansed from all your sin.”

Nikki’s eyes were full of tears as she broke off a piece of the bread and ate it, then drank from the cup.

We continued around the circle: one after another, we confessed our need for a Savior, and one after another, we proclaimed the good news of Jesus to our very real needs. It was an incredibly joyous and tear-filled experience of grace!

I’ve led this same experience many times with brand-new Christians as well as church leaders. It isn’t always the same experience. Some people are not very fluent in the gospel and therefore struggle with how to speak it to specific needs. However, I let people know that’s OK when I start and that those in the group will help one another. I usually ask for someone to volunteer to share, and let the person to the right know he or she will be asked to speak the gospel to the need. I then say: “If you don’t know what to say, let us know and the rest of us will help. Over time, we will all get better at this.”

God has given us many ways to remember him and grow in proclaiming the gospel. They are around us all the time in what is called general revelation—creation and the rhythms of life within it. Our job is to see the truths of God in the everyday life around us and speak the truths of the gospel into it.

The meal—“the Jesus Supper”—is the one he told us to use to regularly remember him. It is also one of the most effective ways I have found to train us to do this in all the other places of life as well.

Start with the meal every week, then practice remembering Jesus at the other meals, and you will have twenty-two stops through your week in gospel remembrance and proclamation.

If you do this, you will be well on your way to growing in gospel fluency with others!⁶

⁶ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 138-142.

Discussion

Have you ever considered taking communion in a Home Group setting? What hesitancies (if any) do you have with this idea? How might this be powerful for you and the members of your community?⁷

Conclusion

As we draw this section to a close, let's talk . . .

Discussion

How do you hope to pursue this value of Faith in your Home Group?

*What assets and liabilities does the Home Group context have when it comes to pursuing this value?
We want to make sure we are capitalizing on the assets and doing our best to avoid the liabilities.*

⁷ For more on the subject of the Lord's Supper, consider the following resources: "Beheld in the Breaking" by Nick Weber (<http://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/beheld-in-the-breaking/>); "A Place at the Table: Rediscovering the Wonder of the Lord's Supper" by Nick Weber (Part 1: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/a-place-at-the-table-rediscovering-the-wonder-of-the-lords-supper-part-1/>); Part 2: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/a-place-at-the-table-rediscovering-the-wonder-of-the-lords-supper-part-2/>); Part 3: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/a-place-at-the-table-rediscovering-the-wonder-of-the-lords-supper-part-3/>; and Part 4: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/a-place-at-the-table-rediscovering-the-wonder-of-the-lords-supper-part-4/>).

Community: Restoring Us to Neighbor

Before You Begin (optional)

- ☐ Read "Expansion 9: Community—A Biblical Introduction to This Value" in the *CMEP*

Introduction

Before we get started, let's talk . . .

Discussion

Describe a time when you really felt known and loved personally while in the context of a small group of believers? What were you doing? What happened? What do you think made it so powerful?

We, the church, exist as the *People* of God. We are the *Family* of Christ, adopted in the Beloved and brought into covenantal relationship with His people. This value presses our church *inwards* in love for one another.

Consider Ephesians 2:19—"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

We were created for community. To know and love others and to let ourselves be known and loved by others. We once were at enmity with one another—bitter enemies like Jew and Gentile. But in Christ, we have been reconciled, brought into the same family room under care of the same Father.

We value Community in this church.

There are a number ways a Home Group can pursue this value. Here are a few to get you started: (1) Share the Table; (2) Tell Stories; (3) Learn to Listen; (4) Celebrate and Suffer; (5) Leverage the Everyday; (6) Walk the Catwalk; and (7) Play the Long Game.

1. Share the Table

When your group gathers around the table to share a meal, something profound and deeply constitutive (i.e. community-forming and culture-shaping) is taking place. Don't miss it!

Consider the thoughts of Tim Chester here in his book *A Meal with Jesus*:

Hospitality involves welcoming, creating space, listening, paying attention, and providing. Meals slow things down. Some of us don't like that. We like to get things done. But meals force you to be people oriented instead of task oriented. Sharing a meal is not the only way to build relationships, but it is number one on that list.

It's possible to remain at a distance from someone in public gatherings—even in a Bible study. Meals bring you close. You see people *in situ*, in life, as they are. You connect and communicate. Novelist Barbara Kingsolver describes dinnertime as "the cornerstone of our family's mental health." "If I had to quantify it," she says, "I'd say 75 percent of my crucial parenting effort has taken place during or surrounding the time our family convenes for our evening meal." Generous hospitality leads to reconciliation. It expresses forgiveness. Unresolved conflict can't be ignored when we gather round the meal table; you can't eat in silence without realizing there's an issue to address. Paul uses hospitality as a metaphor for reconciliation when he says to the Corinthians: "Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one . . ." (2 Cor. 7:2). Hospitality can be a kind of sacrament of forgiveness.

Marzipan cake. That's how my friend Chris knew his mother-in-law had finally accepted him into the family. Now every cake she bakes for him is a reaffirmation of that acceptance. It makes the cake doubly sweet. That's how food so often works. We enjoy food not just because of the taste, but because of the companionship and welcome it expresses. Indeed sometimes we enjoy food despite the taste because of the love in which it's packaged. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it" (Prov. 15:17).

Many people love the idea of the church as community. But when we eat together, we encounter not some theoretical community, but real people with all their problems and quirks. The meal table is an opportunity to give up our proud ideals by which we judge others and accept in their place the real community created by the cross of Christ, with all its brokenness. It's easy to love people in some abstract sense and preach the virtues of love. But we're called to love the real individuals sitting around the table.

"Those who dream of this idealized community," Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns, "demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others, and by themselves. They enter the community of Christians with their demands, set up their own law, and judge one another and even God accordingly." But, Bonhoeffer says, "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate." So "we enter into that life together with other Christians, not as those who make demands, but as those who thankfully receive . . . We do not complain about what God does not give us; rather we are thankful for what God does give us daily." This means that the disillusionment we experience when we encounter real people with their problems is a reminder that we "can never live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and deed that really binds us together, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ."

Hospitality will lead to "collateral damage." Food will be spilled on your carpet. You'll be left with clearing up. Your pantry may be decimated. But remember that God is welcoming you into his home through the blood of his own Son. The hospitality of God embodied in the table fellowship of Jesus is a celebration and sign of his grace and generosity. And we're to imitate that generosity.

Meals also have the power to shape and reshape community. A person to whom we may have related in one role becomes a person to whom we relate as friend. Serving another changes the dynamics of a relationship. The leader who serves at table is no longer aloof.

Meals indicate social status, and they thereby allow us to transform social status. They're a microcosm of social reality that we can manipulate. . . . This is what Jesus is doing in eating with the

marginalized. The marginalized cease to be marginal when they're included around a meal table. The lonely cease to be lonely. The alien ceases to be alien. Strangers become friends.

We live in a graceless culture. Not a graceless world: every bird-song, every kindness, and every meal is a sign of God's ongoing grace toward his creation. But we live in a graceless culture of competition in which we're all trying to get ahead. It's a culture of insecurity in which we're all trying to prove ourselves. We hold grudges, envy success, protect ourselves. In the race to the top you either tread on the competition or they will tread on you. In contrast to the God of Exodus 34:6-7, we're unforgiving and quick to anger. We measure out our love, hold grudges, and get away with whatever we can. Look into the faces of the people on the subway and see the toll the rat race takes on its victims.

In this culture our shared meals offer a moment of grace. A sign of something different. A pointer to God's coming world. "Life in the kingdom . . . demands that we adopt a new set of table manners, and as we observe this etiquette, we become increasingly civilized according to the codes of the city of God." Around the table we offer friendship and celebrate life. Our meals offer a divine moment, an opportunity for people to be seduced by grace into a better life, a truer life, and a more human existence.⁸

There is much we learn about the table in Chester's wise words. Perhaps a bulleted summary will help ensure it all isn't lost on us. Here's just the beginnings of a list:

- The table is critical to family health.
- The table is an instrument of reconciliation and sharing it with others is a "sacrament of forgiveness."
- The table unmask our ideals and leads to real, honest relationships centered around the gospel.
- The table will cost us like the cross cost Jesus.
- The table "reshapes community" and brings all manner of people together as one.
- The table offers "a pointer to God's coming world."
- The table is "an opportunity for people to be seduced by grace into a better life, a truer life, and a more human existence."

⁸ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011), 47-50.

Discussion

Reflect on the bullet points above? How have you seen these things to be true around your table? How will these things influence the way you handle meals in your Home Group? How might you encourage more meaningful connection and community during these times?⁹

How will you handle your group's meals from a logistical standpoint? Will you appoint someone to oversee them? Will you do a potluck or something else? Will you choose themes or let it be a free-for-all? Will you occasionally go all out and let the meal go long into the night? As a suggestion, if you're able, consider providing coffee/tea and/or dessert after the meeting to encourage lingering fellowship, organic connection, and more life on life.¹⁰

2. Tell Stories

Everyone has a story to tell, but not everyone has a listening audience. Everyone has a story to tell, but not everyone feels safe in the telling. Everyone has a story to tell, but not everyone can locate Jesus' presence and place within it. Our call and joy is to invite the stories, listen well, ask another question, draw out the heart, find Jesus together, follow up later, wash, rinse, and repeat.

Throughout the Scriptures, the people of God are called to locate their story as it's been unfolding within the grander story of God. God gives them feasts, rituals, and instructions as ways of continually reorienting them towards the reality both of His grace and goodness and of their own need. We are so prone to recast the narrative, to tell the story in a different way, to spin the facts towards something that isn't true (cf. Exo 16:1-3; Deut 8:11-20). We need help. We need to tell and re-tell our stories . . . together.

For many of the remaining points in this section of the orientation, I will be drawing from Brad Watson's helpful little book *Sent Together*. Here's what he has to say on this idea of telling stories:

Story is a gateway to the soul. Sharing our stories (the good, bad, ugly, and burdensome) is exposing our souls. It takes a brave person to tell another how they truly feel, where they've truly been, and share their scars. However, if you hope to be an authentic and caring community someone will have to share their story with that sort of courage. You will also have to create a safe environment for that to happen . . .

⁹ For help here, consider some of these suggestions given by Brad Watson: (1) Ask each other how the week is going and expect long honest answers. (2) Ask everyone a common question that will lead to deeper understanding of each other (e.g. What is your favorite summer memory from childhood?). (3) Ask about how each person is processing the sermon from Sunday; or about the service that was done as a group the week before; circle back to past hardships people have shared. (4) Ask people simple questions like: What are you thankful for today? What was the hardest part of your day today? (5) You could also have a person or couple in the "spotlight" where they are able to share in more depth their story, current spot in life, and what they are going through. Afterwards, you might give the community a chance to pray for them (see <https://saturatetheworld.com/2018/03/22/eating-together/>).

¹⁰ For more on the subject of meals as ministry, read or listen to "The Table Strategy of Christ and His People" by Nick Weber (Part1: <http://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/the-table-strategy-of-christ-and-his-people-part-1/>; Part 2: (<http://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/the-table-strategy-of-christ-and-his-people-part-2/>)).

After the story, you will want to encourage the listeners to ask questions related to what they shared, not just to get more information, but so that they might pray for the person sharing, and bless them with words related to what they shared. When someone shares something honest you thank them for being honest, acknowledge their bravery, and avoid becoming a problem solver. You want to ask the storyteller how you can pray for them. Then do it.

Finally, you don't want this to be a one-hit wonder. Rather you want to continue sharing stories and learning more about each other Encourage the community to share meals with each other and for it to be a regular thing to ask each other how they are doing and follow up on what they share. Note: *You cannot care for one another in a time-slot.*¹¹

This "storytelling" might take place in a rather informal setting around the table as we simply engage one another and ask about our weeks. But it also might involve more formal times of sharing where we tell the story of our conversion or other significant life milestones.

To assist your group with the sharing of personal testimonies, I created the My Story For His Glory Worksheet.¹² This worksheet is not intended to be something rigid that must be followed point for point. It is, rather, designed to be a sort of "pump-primer"—to help your people brainstorm and discover, perhaps, things in their story they hadn't noticed before. The idea is to help them start to identify how The Story (the gospel) has come to touch and redefine their own story.

Homework

☐ Look over the "My Story for His Glory Worksheet"

- How might you go about encouraging your group to share their testimonies? Why would telling these stories be so important?
- Why are people often scared to share the deeper stuff of their hearts? What can you do to help your Home Group be a safe place for telling honest stories?

3. Learn to Listen

As we eat together, and share stories with one another, one of the things we must learn is to listen well. Communication can be difficult. There are often many barriers to meaningful exchange. Allow me to offer three tips for you to consider as you try to grow in the skill of listening . . .

Tip #1: Don't Despise Small Talk (But Don't Settle for It Either)

I love how Jordan Peterson, a psychology professor at the University of Toronto, answered the question: "Why do I find people's small talk boring?" He writes:

¹¹ Brad Watson, *Sent Together* (GCD Books, 2015), 65-66.

¹² Find it at [https://224f0558ed8e8c437250-](https://224f0558ed8e8c437250-84ca26829e60320e4c4cefe7fc8a2d22.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/m/0e10637970_1593992657_my-story-for-his-glory-worksheet.pdf)

[84ca26829e60320e4c4cefe7fc8a2d22.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/m/0e10637970_1593992657_my-story-for-his-glory-worksheet.pdf](https://224f0558ed8e8c437250-84ca26829e60320e4c4cefe7fc8a2d22.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/m/0e10637970_1593992657_my-story-for-his-glory-worksheet.pdf).

Because you aren't good at listening and then carefully and attentively broadening the conversation. This may in part be because you are cynical with regards to the beginnings of social interaction. Why should strangers offer you anything of real value or take a risk with you until you have demonstrated your ability to handle simple social tasks competently (say without sarcasm or dismissiveness)? So they start off trading in pennies to check you out. You can be virtually certain, as well, that if you find initial small talk boring then the people who are boring you find you, in turn, awkward, charmless, equally boring and perhaps even a bit narcissistic.¹³

Small talk is "trading in pennies." It is a person's way of testing you, of seeing whether you can be trusted with quarters and bills . . . with the things of the heart. Listen well and "broaden the conversation" from there. Don't despise small talk, but don't settle for it either.

Tip #2: Ask Good Questions

Learning to ask good questions is perhaps the most important skill any leader can learn. You might want to read through the gospels and note how often Jesus does exactly this with those whom He's engaging.

But why would such a thing be so important for you as a leader of your Home Group? There are at least three reasons that immediately come to mind:

1. **You probably don't know as much as you think.** When someone begins to open up and share, resist the temptation to fix or give counsel too early. Instead, sit and listen. Ask good questions. There are few things that shut down a person's honest communication like another's quick assumptions and superficial advice. But, on the contrary, there are few things that open up a person like good questions and a listening ear.
2. **They probably know more than you think.** When someone shares something with you about their struggles, jumping to advice makes the implicit assumption that they can't figure it out. It is, therefore, not a little bit dehumanizing. Instead, try asking them things like: "What is God saying to you in this? What do you think you need to do?" Such questions, rather than dehumanizing the person, dignify them. They assume God is already speaking to them. They assume the person is already thinking about these things and has wonderful insights to share. Remember, they have the Holy Spirit too.
3. **Questions have currents.** Questions are not neutral. They lead somewhere. But often they can lead with minimal offense. They invite the person to walk with you in a certain direction. They take a person by the hand and gently guide. You are not pushing them with the sheer force of your opinions. Nor are you carrying them in your own strength. They are walking. You walk together. Again, such questions dignify rather than dehumanize. They lead without lording.

¹³ "Why do I find people's small talk boring?," *Quora*, <https://www.quora.com/Why-do-I-find-peoples-small-talk-boring>.

Tip #3: Circle-Back to Step Ahead

When people do open up and share vulnerable bits of their heart and story with you, don't forget it! Treat such things, as David Powlison would say, as "the fine china of the soul." When a person speaks to you of their burdens and struggles, they have entrusted you with something very valuable to them. Keep it near to you. Remember it in your prayers. See to it that the person and their story remain on your heart. Follow up with them about it the next time you meet. Encourage them concerning it via a midweek email or text. Ironically, one of the best ways to move a relationship forward is to circle back with them concerning things already shared. For such a thing reassures a person that you hear them, care about them, and want to walk with them. And, when it comes time to share again, you just might find they'll be willing to trust you with even more!

Discussion

Which of these tips seems the most important to you? Why? Which do you think will come easiest to you? Which will be the hardest? Explain.

4. Celebrate and Suffer

As we listen well and truly enter into one another's stories, we will soon start to see ways we can celebrate and suffer alongside them. The good will come to the surface and we can rejoice together. But the hard will always be close at hand, and, over such things, we can weep together. Any Home Group hoping to develop Community, will want to consider how they might celebrate and suffer with one another.

With regard to celebration, here are a few things you might keep an eye out for as you are looking to involve your group members in each other's joy:

- Birthdays
- New babies
- New jobs
- Major milestones
- Answered prayers
- Etc.

With regard to suffering, Watson again has helpful things to say here:

Set aside time in your organized community gatherings to ask if anyone needs help, whether it is yard-work, housework, finances, car care, etc. No matter what it is, let people share their needs then help each other. Use whatever skills, talents, or money you have to care for each other's felt needs. Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this communal activity, "active helpfulness," and that's exactly what it is.

This stuff, over time, will lead to deeper needs being shared. Showing up to weed a yard is actually a good sign you might show up at the hospital to sit and pray. If you notice people who are regular helpers but never the receiver of help, this is a sign they don't see themselves as part of the community yet. Or they are carrying burdens they don't think the community can help with. Either way, as a leader this gives you something to pray about and something to ask the person: "I've noticed, you guys never ask for help why is that?"

There are [however] many needs that we experience where the community is helpless. One of the marks of a community that truly cares for one another is the sharing of burdens that cannot be solved by community—for example, terminal cancer, the loss of a parent or child, mental illness, infertility, job loss. In each of these situations, there are tangible ways in which a gospel family can serve and care for the person suffering. However, it doesn't remove the suffering. You can't serve it away. These are opportunities to come alongside those suffering and join them in it. You simply weep as they weep. You listen as they share. You become physically and spiritually present, without a hint of expectation that you can "fix" anything. Instead you allow the other person to know they are not alone—they are seen, heard, and loved.

This is radical in our culture. We usually hide from the issues we mentioned above, hoping the grieving or hurting person just gets over it quickly. We may be there with meals the first few weeks, but then we don't know what else to say. When you get to the point where you don't know what to say, just be present and suffer alongside them. Don't offer hallmark cards or platitudes, but cry with them and share simple truths about God's character. Don't offer explanations for why terrible things happen, offer yourself as a person who wants to walk through their pain with them and as someone who will point them to the pain that Jesus carried on our behalf to make all the sad things untrue.¹⁴

Discussion

What are some of the ways you will try to celebrate/suffer with your group members?

Describe a time when someone suffered well with you. What made it so helpful? What did the person do or not do? Why is it so important that your group members learn to do this wisely as well?

5. Leverage the Everyday

What we learn from watching Jesus in the gospels is that Christian community and discipleship should be happening in the course of everyday life. It's not so much something you add to your schedule as much as it is something you do along the way. Therefore, consider inviting your group members into what you are already doing. Share hearts while you make dinner, while you clean the house, while you're in between board meetings, or whatever. Make disciples along the way. And encourage your group members to do the same.

Hear Watson again on this:

¹⁴ Brad Watson, *Sent Together* (GCD Books, 2015), 66-67.

We certainly can't be family growing in our love for one another if we settle for just being together once a week. But we also live busy lives with many commitments. We have a lot going on with our jobs, school, families, hobbies, and the ordinary demands of everyday life (laundry, cleaning, cooking).

Remember, church isn't something you attend; it's something that you are! You are the church as you work, go to school, participate in sports, enjoy hobbies, and do ordinary things. Do ordinary things but with gospel intentionality. In other words, do the everyday things of life but do them in a way that shows your devotion to Jesus, one another, and your neighbors and city! We encourage one another to do things you already do but to do them with others in community.

Think through your average week: What are some of your commitments and weekly rhythms? Here's a list to get you started.

- Chores/Errands: Yard-work, home improvement, auto care, grocery shopping, etc.
- Recreation: Vacations, hobbies, exercise, sports leagues, book clubs, etc.
- Meals: Most people eat twenty-one meals a week. You could share a few of these with people in your community.¹⁵

Discussion

Does pursuing community and making disciples along the way sound realistic? What roadblocks seem to stand in the way? What's one step you can take to pursue this with your group?

6. Walk the Catwalk

Often, whether we like it or not, the culture of a group is set by its leaders. This means that one of the most effective ways you can encourage all that we've been talking about in your group is to actually live it out yourself. Model it for them to see and emulate. Walk the catwalk, so to speak.

With regard to this, let's watch the short video linked below . . .

¹⁵ Ibid., 64-65.

Discussion

☐ **Watch “Cultivating Meaningful Relationships in Small Groups” by Mike Emlet**

(<https://www.ccef.org/resources/video/cultivating-meaningful-relationships-small-groups>)

- *For a little humor, read the Babylon Bee’s article “Report: Every Single Person At Church Doing ‘Fine’” (<https://babylonbee.com/news/report-every-single-person-church-fine/>). Why do you think people often respond this way? Have you experienced this in your own relationships? How have you attempted to move towards more authentic connection? How did it go?*
- *Following Emlet’s counsel, why do you think modeling might be a good idea? Why would asking questions help? What sorts of questions would you ask?*
- *How do we navigate the line between complacency and pushiness here? How do we both give people space and call people into more?*

7. Play the Long Game

Consider the strangely encouraging words of Watson here:

Despite all these tools and ideas, you cannot create a community that bears with each other in love. In fact, I can guarantee there will be awkwardness, empty promises, lies, disappointments, and mini-disasters. Despite all of your attempts to clarify the gospel and the implication that we ought to love one another, the people you lead will not. Your community, more often than not, will feel like it is only a few steps away from falling apart. This disappointment often brings out the hero complex in leaders. As they help shape a community and begin to watch people grow in caring for one another, they may be tempted to wrap up each person’s story by themselves. As things go poorly for different members or the whole, they rush to solve things. They force conflict resolution meetings, interventions, and tell people what to do next. When things still go poorly, they blame themselves. All the while they’ve lost sight of the Christ who called them to community. The Savior who forms it. The God who leads it. Other leaders approach this disappointment by looking for new recruits. They look at the chaos of their . . . community and conclude, “If only I had some serious radical Christians this would work. These people just don’t get it.” In the words of Eugene Peterson: “There are no green beret Christians.” While you covet people who “get it,” God has given you a few sorry saints to simply love—not to control and dismiss, but to love the way Jesus loved his disciples. Leaders, don’t miss out on the transformative joy of growing in love for your fellow brother or sister. Surrender your ideal of community. When you do, the pressure is off and you find Christ forming his people.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., 67-68.

Discussion

What unrealistic ideals do you think you might bring into your Home Group? What frustrations have you faced in groups you've been a part of in the past? Why is learning to play the long game so important? How have you seen this work out in your own experiences?

Conclusion

As we draw this section to a close, let's talk . . .

Discussion

How do you hope to pursue this value of Community in your Home Group?

What assets and liabilities does the Home Group context have when it comes to pursuing this value? We want to make sure we are capitalizing on the assets and doing our best to avoid the liabilities.¹⁷

¹⁷ For more on the subject of Community, consider the following resources: *Side by Side* by Ed Welch; *Caring for One Another* by Ed Welch; *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer; *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp; *Resolving Everyday Conflict* by Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson; "Patience unto Peace: Learning to Love One Another Wisely" by Nick Weber (Part 1: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/patience-unto-peace-part-1/>; Part 2: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/patience-unto-peace-part-2/>); "Merciful Judgement: A Field Guide" by Nick Weber (Part 1: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/merciful-judgment-a-field-guide-part-1/>; Part 2: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/merciful-judgment-a-field-guide-part-2/>; Part 3: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/merciful-judgment-a-field-guide-part-3/>).

Mission: Restoring Us to City

Before You Begin (optional)

☐ Read "Expansion 13: Mission—A Biblical Introduction to This Value" in the *CMEP*

Introduction

Before we get started, let's talk . . .

Discussion

Describe a time when God really used you and a small group of people to minister to and reach the unbelieving? What were you doing? What happened? What do you think made it so powerful?

We, the church, exist for the *Purpose* of God. We are the *Embassy* of Christ, commissioned by the Savior to be His ambassadors—salt and light in a world decaying and going dark. This value presses our church *outwards* in love for the unbelieving.

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:20—"We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

We were created for something so much bigger than ourselves. We were created to take part in the rush of working alongside our Creator—in pushing back darkness and calling rebels to lay down their arms and live. We once had abandoned such a high calling, building towers of Babel instead of temples of God. But now, in Christ, we've been called off the bench and put back in the game! Our lives have regained their grand meaning.

We value Mission in this church.

There are a number ways a Home Group can pursue this value. Here are a few to get you started: (1) Connect the Stories; (2) Encourage the Missionary Lifestyle; (3) Develop a Scout Mentality; (4) Consider a Common Mission; and (5) Walk in Circles.

1. Connect the Stories

It might not have been evident up to this point, but each part of this training has been flowing into the next. It is critical that we see this before we fully dive into the idea of Mission. Perhaps we could talk

about it from the perspective of connecting stories: *The Story* (Faith), connects to *Our Story* (Community), connects to *Their Story* (Mission).¹⁸

The Story

As we pursue the value of Faith in our groups, we are really attempting to get to know *The Story*, the biblical narrative, the Christian worldview, the gospel. God is telling the one true Story and we want to know it by heart. So we study the Scriptures together. And we watch the unfolding plotline—from Creation to Fall to Redemption and final Consummation. We learn to see Jesus—His person and work—at the center of it all. Every verse of the Bible becomes good news when run to and through Him! What we come to find is that the Bible, with its myriad of authors and books, characters and stories, is, in the end, telling one story, *The Story*, the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

Our Story

But learning *The Story* in this way, intellectually, or even theologically, we might say, is not enough. It must be brought to bear on our own lives. We must see how *The Story* touches and reorients our own stories.²⁰

This, in many ways, is what we are after when we pursue the value of Community in our Home Groups. To be sure, such reorientation should be happening in our own private devotions as we read the Scriptures and learn to preach the gospel to ourselves. But this sort of thing can be worked out especially well in community, as we learn to minister the gospel meaningfully to one another. We listen to each other's stories and together learn to retell them in light of *The Story*. We see how the gospel connects—how Jesus is not only the center of *The Story*, He is the center of our own as well.

Their Story

All of this, in many ways, serves as preparation for our bringing of the gospel to the unbelieving. We cannot give to others that which we don't possess ourselves. We must know *The Story* and come to see how it connects with and reorients our own stories, before we will ever be able to meaningfully share it with others. No doubt, Mission ought to be a priority in our groups, but it must flow from our Faith and Community or it will fall flat in the end.²¹

¹⁸ See "Appendix 5: The Story Diagram."

¹⁹ See "Appendix 4: The Hub Diagram" again for this. What we will soon realize is that learning to make these connections to Christ in the storyline of Scripture will actually help us make connections to Christ as we seek to minister to one another and the unbelieving! The Christocentric hermeneutic, then, is not merely a method of Bible study, it is critical preparation for the care of souls and the missionary's labor. When we come to see the centrality of Christ in *The Story*, we will better see how He fits at the center of all other stories as well (ours and theirs).

²⁰ See the My Story for His Glory Worksheet again as an example of what this might look like (link at footnote 12).

²¹ One way of helping your people begin to draw lines toward the unbelievers in their lives is to incorporate good, outward-focused questions into your time of studying the Scriptures. As you look to Discover, Nurture, and Apply whatever it is you are studying, undoubtedly you will attempt to help your group see how the truths apply to themselves. Here is the move from *The Story* to *Our Story*. But after this starts to become clearer, you can take things one step further and ask things like: "*Think of an unbelieving family member, friend, coworker, neighbor, etc. How would you communicate the gospel of Jesus from this text to them? How can the comfort you received from Christ here be shared with them? Why do they need to hear this? How would it connect with their story? How does it bring news that they would call good?*" Here is the move from *The Story* through *Our Story* to *Their Story*.

The Woman at the Well

I often think of the woman at the well, and it might be helpful to consider her here once more. Do we not see this idea of connecting stories play out in her life as Jesus is attempting to reach her with the gospel in John 4?

- He helps her get *The Story* straight. “[S]alvation is from the Jews” (v. 22). The Samaritans had the wrong temple, the wrong text, the wrong story. “I who speak to you am He [the Christ]” (v. 26). He is the fulfillment of all Old Testament expectation, the center of *The Story*.
- He makes meaningful connections from *The Story* to her story. “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (v. 10). He sees her thirst. He knows she is searching. He shows her that He is the answer—the One who can make sense of her story and bring needed rescue.
- The connection was electric. It lit her up. The joy of it all propelled her towards others. “So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’ They went out of the town and were coming to him” (vv. 28-30). *The Story* had invaded and reoriented her story. And this moved her towards their story.

As a Home Group leader you are partnering with Jesus to help your group members make these same sorts of connections—from *The Story* to Our Story to Their Story . . . from Faith to Community to Mission.

Discussion

How might learning to more intuitively and reflexively see Jesus at the center of the biblical story help us grow in our ability to bring Him meaningfully into the story of unbelievers? How does learning to minister the gospel meaningfully to other believers, prepare us to do the same for unbelievers? How can you help your people make these connections?

Why is it important that Mission flows out from Faith and Community? What happens when Mission becomes disconnected from them? Have you ever been a part of a group where evangelism becomes a new form of legalism and self-justification? What can you do to keep your group’s evangelistic efforts grounded in the grace and love of God for us in Christ?

2. Encourage the Missionary Lifestyle

Life Is the Program

When it comes to mission in the church, there seems often to be a significant point of confusion. Many consider evangelism and missions to be something the church as an institution is to “put on” and call its people into. The leaders run this or that program or “crusade” and the members can come for an hour here or there and join in.

But this is not what we see anywhere in the Scriptures. The approach is much more organic, much more decentralized, much more comprehensive. A closer look at the New Testament makes plain that missions is not merely to be an item on one's to-do list or an event on one's calendar (though it certainly will include this), it's rather a *way of life*. It permeates everything we do. As I've heard Jeff Vanderstelt say: "Life is the program."²²

In the gospels, Jesus' mission cannot be distinguished from His everyday life. They are one and the same. And so it should be for us as well.

The goal here then is to help the members of our groups make a "gospel shift." Instead of waiting for "the church" to call them into something missional, they must see that they, as the church, have already been called by God to be so in the everyday stuff of their lives. Instead of merely *coming to* "church," we must encourage them to *go be* the church.

Every Saint Sent

In a sermon mini-series developed from Luke 9:1-6, I made the case that *every saint is sent*—that every Christian is a missionary of God. I certainly don't have time to go through these things again here, but I did want to revisit what, in the last message of that series, I called the three basic steps of a missionary lifestyle. Let me summarize them again for our consideration at this point:

1. **Presence** ("*I am here*"): Get your people thinking about the unbelievers they already know—family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances. God places us where He does with a purpose (cf. Acts 17:26). He desires us to be truly present with those around us—as ambassadors representing the King, as a royal priesthood interceding for the lost, as salt and light pushing back decay and darkness, as missionaries bringing good news to broken people. Who are they already present with? How can they pursue more meaningful presence with them and others God may be calling them to?
2. **Opportunism** ("*I am ready*"): Help your people see the gospel opportunities that abound around them. As they pursue presence with those God has placed them near and is calling them to, as they hear their hearts and get to know their stories, they should start to see countless ways they can show and share the good news of Jesus with them. They should be able to identify things they can do to move the person one step closer to Christ. They should be able to pray for them more intelligently, invite them more naturally (e.g. to meals, events, services, groups, etc.), serve them more effectively, share resources with them more relevantly, and speak the gospel to them more meaningfully. What opportunities for showing and sharing the good news of Jesus can your people identify? Help them brainstorm and pray through all the possibilities.
3. **Courage** ("*I am willing*"): This last step is the hardest. It is, perhaps, easy for us to dream up all the things we might do for Jesus. But actually doing something for Him is another matter. Here is where being on mission really starts to cost us—our time, our reputation, our money,

²² Consider also these words from Brad Watson: "The missional church is not about adding activities to an already busy life; rather, it is a matter of being yourself in the everyday with gospel intentionality" (Brad Watson, *Sent Together* (GCD Books, 2015), 79-80).

etc. We are present with people, praying for and open to opportunities, and then we lean into God for courage to actually go and do as He leads. Your people need support and accountability in this. *You* need support and accountability in this. Pray for one another. Check in on one another. *En-courage* one another. Watch God move towards the unbelieving through one another. And rejoice (cf. Luke 15:6,7, 9, 10, 22-24)!

You might consider having an ongoing conversation with your group about these things. There is an unfortunate tendency in us towards what I call “mission drift.” We naturally move towards comfort and, let’s face it, the missionary lifestyle isn’t comfortable. Your group will trend towards insulation and isolation. Good leadership presses into the discomfort and keeps the group looking out. It raises awareness again and again of the call, the cost, and the joy of being God’s missionary in the everyday. I trust, in Christ, you will be such a leader!

Discussion

Do you believe that every saint is sent, that every Christian is a missionary of God? What ways do you personally attempt to live in light of this call?

What are some ways you might help those in your group pursue greater presence with unbelievers in their lives?²³

Thinking of those unbelievers you have presence with right now, what sorts of opportunities would you say you have to show and share the good news of Jesus with them?

What do you think often stops Christians from moving out in courage with the good news? What can you do to help cultivate courage within your group?

²³ Here’s a few suggestions to get you started: (1) become a regular at shops in your zip code; (2) take walks around your neighborhood or workplace; (3) pursue a hobby with others; (4) volunteer your time around town; (5) join a local gym; (6) leave margin in your schedule for “interruption” and surprise; (7) rethink the way you eat meals.

On that last suggestion, consider the fact that the average person eats 21 meals a week. What would it look like for us to commit to eat one of those with a person we are hoping to bring closer to Jesus? Tim Chester writes this:

Jesus didn’t run projects, establish ministries, create programs, or put on events. He ate meals. If you routinely share meals and you have a passion for Jesus, then you’ll be doing mission. It’s not that meals save people. People are saved through the gospel message. But meals will create natural opportunities to share that message in a context that resonates powerfully with what you’re saying. . . .

Meals bring mission into the ordinary. But that’s where most people are—living in the ordinary. That’s where we need to go to reach them. We too readily think of mission as extraordinary. Perhaps that’s because we find it awkward to talk about Jesus outside a church gathering. Perhaps it’s because we think God moves through the spectacular rather than the witness of people like us. Perhaps it’s because we want to outsource mission to the professionals, so we invite people to guest services where an “expert” can do mission for us. But most people live in the ordinary, and most people will be reached by ordinary people. Even those who attend a special event will, for the most part, have first been befriended by a Christian. (Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011), 89, 91)

Homework

☐ Read “Appendix 6: Don’t Overcomplicate Evangelism” by Tony Merida

→ *What are your initial thoughts about Merida’s plan? Do you see how it relates to the three steps above? Do you have people that come to mind for you in each of the five networks—Family, Friends, Coworkers, Neighbors, Acquaintances? Are you engaging in some way with each the five activities—Pray, Invite, Serve, Give, Share? How have you seen these activities play out in your own life and ministry? How might you use Merida’s framework to encourage your group in their calling as everyday missionaries?*

3. Develop a Scout Mentality

The point here is really quite simple. Make sure, as your group members engage in the missionary lifestyle, that they don’t forget they are connected to a larger body of missionaries.

Every saint is sent. And we are sent to live with gospel intentionality in the everyday rhythms of our own personal lives. In one sense, then, we go alone for Jesus in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and stomping grounds. We are the ones making connections, developing relationships, and bringing the light of the gospel into dark places. The other group members can’t do this for us. It is our personal call and privilege from God.

But, while, in this one sense, we are sent out into our everyday lives alone, we must remember that, in yet another sense, we are never alone. Here is where we come to this idea of a “scout mentality.” We go for Jesus individually, but we have the larger army of God behind us.

To help develop this mentality among your group, consider the following suggestions:

- In your group’s gathering time, talk openly and honestly about people you are hoping to move towards for the gospel and pray for one another. Remember to follow-up and provide ongoing encouragement.
- As your people begin living as everyday missionaries, they will start to identify countless opportunities to minister to their neighbors, coworkers, friends in word and deed (at least they should!). Invite them to communicate these opportunities to the group and prayerfully consider how you all might use your gifts and resources to come together and help.²⁴
- The missional lifestyle is hard. Inevitably your group members will hit roadblocks and come to points of confusion. Invite them to share these things and encourage brainstorming among the group. How would you respond to these objections? What resources might be helpful in

²⁴ For example, imagine one of your group members is taking a walk around his neighborhood and, in passing conversation, he finds out that a neighbor recently lost her spouse to cancer. His heart is broken for her and he wants to serve. So, remembering that he is a scout connected to a larger army of missionaries, he brings this for prayer to your Home Group’s weekly gathering. There you all pray, brainstorm, and come up with numerous ideas: (1) you could start a meal train for her if she’d be open to it; (2) you could help with the yardwork her husband used to be responsible for; (3) you could make a care package for her and let her know that she’s on your heart and that your group will be praying for her in this hard time; etc.

reaching this person? What might you do to serve him/her? What could you invite him/her to? How can we pray more intelligently and intentionally in this?

- Celebrate the steps of faith that people take to move towards others with the gospel, however big or small. Don't just talk about what everyone is not doing. Make sure you rejoice in what they already are doing—where God's Spirit is on the move.

Discussion

Why is it important that we remember we are connected to a larger army of missionaries? How else might you try to develop a scout mentality among your group members?

4. Consider a Common Mission

As members in your group engage the missionary lifestyle with a scout mentality, it is quite likely that, in time, your group may feel led to identify a common mission—a particular missional focus that you sense God calling you to pursue together.

- Maybe a member keeps bringing up the needs of families at her kid's school and your group decides to come together to see how you might more formally serve and bring Jesus there.
- Maybe a member has a heart for the homeless in your city and your group feels called to pursue that mission with them.
- Maybe a member has a parent in a convalescent home that he's trying to reach and your group decides to expand on this mission and host a Bible study there for any who would be interested.
- Maybe a member of your group is involved with Kids Club at the school and in hearing about this you grow a heart for the families in the neighborhood around the church that don't speak English. Perhaps you decide to host an ESL class as a way of reaching them for Jesus.

To help identify such a focus for your group, consider again those three basic steps of Presence, Opportunity, and Courage—only now through the lens of common mission.²⁵

1. **Presence** ("We are here"): Where has God already put us? Who are we already around? What are we already doing in the city? Where are we already present? What do we like doing? What do we feel gifted at? What do we feel passionate about? What "people group" is on our heart? If we feel called to something we are currently not engaging with, how can we pursue presence in that area, with those people?
2. **Opportunity** ("We are ready"): As we pursue greater presence, as we walk with our eyes open, as we engage these people and places, what opportunities are there for meaningfully ministering the gospel to them in deed and word? How can we show the gospel as we share

²⁵ You might use these questions to brainstorm with your group. Come together, pray, discuss, and whiteboard all the possibilities. Then take a week to seek the Lord and fast on your own. Come back and try to determine where God is particularly calling you to focus. Make a decision and step out in faith!

it? In what ways can we lay our lives down for them in love? What needs do they have that we can meet as a bridge to the gospel? How can we serve/love them in a way that demands a gospel explanation (cf. 1 Pet 3:15)? What story (Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation) are they living in? What false god/gospel are they hoping in to make things right? How is it letting them down? How does Jesus bring satisfaction to what they are longing for? How is Jesus the answer to the questions they are asking? How can Jesus be the Hero of their story? How can we touch their story with *The Story*?

3. **Courage** (*"We are willing"*): Of the many things we could do to bring the gospel to them, what do we feel God is calling us to do? What are the next steps? What is our plan/commitment/challenge? How do we need to rearrange our schedules to pursue this? What do we need to hold each other accountable to do?

Discussion

Why might it be good for your group to consider a common mission? What would be challenging about this?

Considering the questions above, what might you feel led to pursue as a common mission? What would it look like to take next steps towards this?

- ☐ **Watch "What Does Missional Community Life Look Like?" by Jeff Vanderstelt**
(<https://youtu.be/kxviBBxbZqI>)

→ *What do you think about the vision for church small groups presented here? What inspires you? What challenges you? What might you take away from this and seek to implement in your own group?*

5. Walk in Circles

By "walk in circles" I simply mean to say: *persevere* with those you are trying to reach with the gospel!

Often we think of evangelism as a line. We get into relationships with people in an effort to bring the gospel to them. We will put up with the typical relational niceties. We will talk about the weather, go to the dinner parties, and so forth . . . but we will only go so far. There comes a point where we must get to what we've really been after all along. We must share the gospel. So we share and, to our dismay, they are uninterested. They push back. We quickly counter. Things get awkward. What now?

We often don't know how to proceed. Our whole purpose in this relationship was to share the gospel and we didn't "close the sale." Evangelism was a line. It was point A to B to C and things didn't progress as planned. So the relationship ends. But should it?

Now, don't misunderstand me, certainly it is not wrong to pursue relationships with unbelievers in hopes of bringing the gospel to them. Such efforts can be the very essence of love. And, what's more,

there certainly are times when Jesus calls us to move out on His mission in straight lines. We might think of the time where He sends out the seventy-two and instructs them to stay and minister in those towns that receive them but to move right on past those towns that reject (Luke 10:1-12). We might think of those seemingly harsh words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs . . ." (Matt 7:6a). And so on.

So I know that there are certain missions that call for lines. And I know that there are certain relationships that must eventually be moved on from. But I also know that most of our everyday evangelistic efforts will play out like circles. We will draw near to people, ask to hear more of their story, listen and engage, serve them as best we are able, share the good news of Jesus with them . . . and they will reject it.

But the relationships, the friendships we are forming, don't have to end. In love, in patience, in perseverance, we simply bend that line back and go around again. We continue to draw near, we ask for more, we listen and care, we love and serve, we pray and pray, and, as God opens doors, we share the hope of Jesus once more.

We go in circles. And we get somewhere.

It might be helpful to think of this in terms of God's special and common grace. Special grace is that saving grace that is made available to us through the cross of Jesus Christ. It is God's goodness that comes to us through the gospel and washes us of sin. Common grace is that grace that God shows to all men, regardless of their relation to Christ. It is the sunshine that He lets warm both the good and the evil. It is the rain that He lets fall upon both the righteous and the unrighteous. Common grace, if you will, is God going in circles around a sinful humanity. "Okay, you rebel and reject . . . but let's go around again . . . and again . . . and again!" The sun comes up. The rain falls down. Common grace woos and allures and draws towards the special grace made available in Christ. But it often takes time.

And so it will likely be for you and your group as you seek to live on mission for Jesus. God perseveres with patience and love for sinners. May we do the same!

Discussion

Reflecting on your own personal testimony, would you say you came to Christ by way of a line or a circle?

In your own ministry, have you seen evangelism more as a line or a circle? Why might it be important for your group to consider the circle? How can you encourage this?

Conclusion

As we draw this section to a close, let's talk . . .

Discussion

How do you hope to pursue this value of Mission in your Home Group?

What assets and liabilities does the Home Group context have when it comes to pursuing this value?

We want to make sure we are capitalizing on the assets and doing our best to avoid the liabilities.²⁶

Because we understand Mission as flowing from Faith through Community (and rightly so!), often groups can give themselves to the first two of these values and never really get around to this last one.

Everyone is too busy and tired to add something else to their schedules. Your group members have enough stress and hardship in their own lives already. Why should we go looking to serve others? Is it even right to do so when our own lives are in such need (cf. Isa 58:10-11, John 4:34)? Beyond all of these concerns, there is the fact that evangelism and missions is uncomfortable, awkward, and even frightening. Your group will, by the very nature of it, tend to bend inward away from such things. Your people (and even you) will likely prefer the relative comfort of a good Bible study and dinner with friends to the challenge of serving and speaking to others about Jesus. I call this "mission drift" and you will surely face it in your own group. How do you plan to push back against it?

²⁶ For more on the subject of Mission, consider the following resources: "Everyday Rhythms" by Jeff Vanderstelt (Parts 1 and 2: <https://saturatetheworld.com/everyday-rhythms/>); *Saturate* by Jeff Vanderstelt; *Gospel Fluency* by Jeff Vanderstelt; *A Field Guide for Everyday Mission* by Ben Connelly and Bob Roberts Jr.; *Every Saint Sent* by Nick Weber (Part 1: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/every-saint-sent-preparatives/>; Part 2: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/every-saint-sent-objectives-part-1/>; Part 3: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/every-saint-sent-objectives-part-2/>; Part 4: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/every-saint-sent-objectives-part-3/>; Part 5: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/every-saint-sent-directives/>; Part 6: <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/every-saint-sent-ready-for-departure/>).

Getting Started

Now that you've made it to the end of Orientation (congratulations!), here are some things to consider as, Lord willing, you look to launch your group:

- **Brainstorm & Draft:** Prayerfully consider how your group pursue Faith, Community, and Mission? What will you study? How will you handle prayer requests? What will you do with meals? How will you care for any young children?²⁷ What might you pursue for a common mission? What will a typical gathering look like? What will you do at your first meeting?
- **Committed Core:** Pray for and try to gather a committed core group of at least 4-5 people. We're happy to let you share your preliminary vision during a Sunday Service. We can also utilize our various communication channels to promote things if you'd like. As a committed core emerges, refine your vision further with them.
- **Gathering Place:** Where will you meet?
- **Day & Time:** What day will you meet? When? How often?
- **Divide & Conquer:** Who will do what? As people are added to your group, consider their gifts and how God may want them to use them in the context of your Home Group. You may want someone else responsible for communications, meal coordinating, prayer request follow-up, outreach planning, etc.
- **Invite & Welcome:** As your group launches, don't sit around and wait for people to come to you. Pray and ask God to lead you to them. Invite people—from church of course, but also from your neighborhood, your work, and your social circles. Cast the net and ask God to draw.
- **Planning Center Groups:** Be sure to set up your group on Planning Center so newcomers can find it. Learn more about this tool and decide how much of it you will make use of.²⁸

God be with you!

²⁷ We recognize that childcare in a Home Group is often a complex factor. Please know that the Elders of Mercy Hill are happy to work with you to find a solution. We are happy to even talk budget and things if financial support will help. We don't want anyone, especially young families, to be kept from the blessing of community.

²⁸ See "Appendix 7: Using Planning Center Groups" for more details on this.

Appendix 1:

How to Facilitate a Book Discussion

The following is intended to help you prepare for and facilitate a book discussion with your Home Group or other small group of people interested in following Jesus together.²⁹ There are obviously many different ways to do this. What follows are just some suggestions to get you started!

First Steps:

- **Identify the resource.** Try to make sure it is both *relevant* and *accessible* to those you are wanting to engage it with. What are people passionate about? What are people struggling with? Where do we often get stuck? Where do we need to see growth? What book might help us move forward towards Jesus together? Discuss these things with your group.³⁰
- **Determine the pacing.** At what pace will you make your way through the given material? Set out a plan for reading and discussion that you feel is both *manageable* and *marching*. You don't want it to move so quickly that you overwhelm your group members. But you also want to avoid moving so slowly that you never get through the book! Discuss these things with your group.
- **Work out the how.** Be sure that everyone in your group is clear on not only the *what?* (identify the resource), the *when?* (determine the pacing), but also the *how?* How do you want them to read it? Are you going to be using the DNA Group Resource Framework and the 3Qs (Quotes, Questions, Quarrels)?³¹ If so, you'll want to explain that to them and encourage them to mark those things and even take notes/journal as they read.³² How are you going to facilitate the discussion time? Do you want different people to facilitate different weeks? Again, discuss these things with your group.

Before Each Group Meeting:

- **Read the assigned chapter(s).** Remember to read first for understanding. The initial goal in reading isn't to come to a work with all of *your* thoughts and ideas, but to sit back and listen to *the author's*—to make sure you understand him/her rightly before you do anything else. James' advice comes in to help us here: "let every person be quick to hear, [and] slow to speak" (James 1:19).

²⁹ With slight modification, the same basic approach can certainly be taken in attempting to read with those skeptical or seeking out the faith as well.

³⁰ For suggestions see *Mercy Hill's Recommended Resources* page online at mercyhillchurch.org.

³¹ Find this online at <https://mercyhillchurch.org/community/dna-groups/>.

³² We strongly recommend that your group members do this as it is important that they learn to read carefully and actively. Their work with the 3Qs in advance of your group meetings will make your discussion times that much more rich and transformative.

- **Outline the author's flow of thought.** If you are the one facilitating the discussion, it is especially important that you have a good sense of what the author is actually saying. One helpful way to attempt this is to write out a quick outline of each chapter as you read it. Try to identify the chapter's Big Idea and any main points that support it. It is often helpful to simply make note of the structure the author has already provided. Looking at the chapter and section titles will likely clue you into his/her flow of thought and help you outline it as we've here described.
- **Make note of your 3Qs.** As you read, you'll want to make note of any *Quotes* (things that stand out to you as particularly important or relevant), *Questions* (things you find hard to understand), or *Quarrels* (things you disagree with). You might consider having a particular mark you put in the margin for each so you can return to them later with ease (e.g. you could draw a star for any Quotes, a question mark for any Questions, and an X for any Quarrels). For each, use the questions on the Resource Framework Cue Card or Worksheet to help stimulate your thinking further.³³
- **Create a list of discussion questions.** Having outlined the author's thought and made note of things you find particularly important, confusing, or even mistaken, you are now in better position to create a list of discussion questions for potential use when your group meets next. As a suggestion, you might identify certain quotes that you will read during the discussion time and then spin off questions from it. It is important here to remember that the goal of studying God's Word is always to *Discover*, *Nurture*, and *Apply* Christ together. The questions you create should engage your group members in these three basic areas. Discover questions help us make sure we understand what the author is saying and see how it relates the Scriptures and the good news of Jesus. Nurture questions take us deeper than mere understanding and begin to ask if we really believe what we are learning? They open windows into the heart of each group member and expose where we need to repent and re-root ourselves in Jesus. Apply questions get your group thinking about how all of this will influence and affect our lives going forward.³⁴

During Each Group Meeting:

So you've read the assigned material. You have your simple outline, your 3Qs, and your discussion questions. What next? How do you actually facilitate a group meeting?

- **Catch up for a few minutes.** One goal in discussing books as a group is that you might grow together in friendship and community. Don't be so set on getting to and through your book discussion that you actually neglect the people in your group! Leave space for organic connection and sharing.
- **Open in prayer.** Without God's intervention and help we will accomplish nothing.

³³ Again, see <https://mercyhillchurch.org/community/dna-groups/> for more details on this.

³⁴ Some resources already have questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. Obviously, you may find it best to use them. But, perhaps, you'll feel led to add a few questions of your own!

- **Revisit the last group meeting's discussion (if applicable).** Before diving into new material, summarize what your group discussed last time. Come back to any questions you left unanswered. Ask how people did in applying what they learned. Etc.
- **Review this week's reading.** Transition to this week's material. Begin with a summary of the author's thought. You might consider asking the group what they would say the Big Idea for the chapter was. How would they sum it up in a sentence? After they share their answers, proceed to share your own. Then quickly walk them through the outline you created so people can be reminded of the main points and the structure of the chapter. This will serve as a backdrop to your discussion time and will hopefully help keep people on track.
- **Engage your discussion questions and the group's 3Qs.** Remember that, at this point, you should have a list of discussion questions and each member of your group should have some notes on the 3Qs for them personally. With these things in place, then, there are a couple different approaches you could take. You might start with the discussion questions you created and end by asking for the group's 3Qs if there's still time.³⁵ Or you might start with the group's 3Qs and end with your discussion questions if there's still time. Either way, you'll likely find that these two elements work together in a sort of synergy. In the first approach, your discussion questions will likely lead your group to talk about some of their quotes, questions, and quarrels. In the second approach, you'll probably find that their quotes, questions, and quarrels prompt you to ask some of the discussion questions you'd been planning to ask. Let your discussion time be a living, breathing thing where, remember, your goal in it all is to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together!³⁶
- **Close in prayer.** Certainly prayer is good for more than merely opening and closing a meeting! You may find that you want to stop and pray in the middle of things. But, at the very least, it is good to begin and end your times in prayer as it reminds everyone involved that you've been discussing these things in the presence of God! By the end, you should also have a sense of specific ways you can pray for each other. You've talked about your hearts and how the things in the book relate to your life. Leave space to pray for each other regarding these things!
- **Clarify the plan for next time.** When and where will you be meeting? What should be read for discussion? Who will be facilitating? Etc.

After Each Group Meeting:

- **Keep the conversation going.** In the time between group meetings, you might consider ways to keep the conversation going. Perhaps you (or someone you assign) can send out a summary of the last meeting's discussion with any relevant action steps, prayer points, unanswered questions to research, etc. You may also reach out personally to people in your

³⁵ Remember, to aid in discussing your group's 3Qs, we created the Resource Framework Cue Card and Worksheet. We encourage you to utilize them!

³⁶ If your group is meeting to discuss multiple chapters, we would suggest proceeding through bullet points 4, 5, 6 above one chapter at a time (i.e. take the first chapter and review it, ask your discussion questions for it, request the group's 3Qs regarding it . . . then move to the next chapter and do the same).

group on matters they asked for prayer or accountability for. The goal (as always!) is to keep your group engaging with Jesus and growing in His image and likeness!

Appendix 2:

How to Facilitate a Sermon Discussion

The following is intended to help you prepare for and facilitate a sermon discussion with your Home Group or other small group of people interested in following Jesus together. There are obviously many different ways to do this. What follows are just some suggestions to get you started!

Before Each Group Meeting:

- **Send out the sermon.** Email your group members a link to the sermon in advance to make sure everyone's heard it before you meet. As a way of encouraging their engagement, you might consider asking them as they listen to make note of any *Quotes* (things that struck them), *Questions* (things that confused them), and *Quarrels* (things that they disagreed with)—the "3Qs." These things may well factor into your discussion time.
- **Re-listen and reflect.** Consider listening to the sermon again yourself. Much like watching a movie twice, you may find that you notice things the second time through that you didn't catch before. You take the material in a bit deeper. Identify your own 3Qs. Listen especially with concern for your group—praying for them, thinking of them. What do they need to hear, focus on, etc.? How should this impact them?
- **Catch the big picture with the sermon handout (if there is one).** Look over the sermon handout where you'll find the big idea, main points, and a few prepared reflection questions. Here you'll get a macro vision of things. Consider how you may use this handout in your discussion and where you will still need to supplement, etc.
- **Dive deeper with the sermon manuscript (if there is one).** Look back through the sermon manuscript to get more of a micro view among the details. Make note of the flow of thought and how all the various points fit together. Identify key verses, quotes, points that struck you, etc. and begin to formulate additional discussion questions from them.
- **Bring in additional material.** Feel free to bring in additional Scripture verses, quotes from other readings, etc. if you feel it supplements and carries further the main ideas of the sermon.
- **Finalize and order your discussion questions.** Having now a strong sense of the sermon's content and a better idea of where God is wanting you to take it with your group, polish up your discussion questions and put them in an order that makes most sense to you. It is important here to remember that the goal of studying God's Word is always to *Discover*, *Nurture*, and *Apply* Christ together. The questions you create should engage your group members in these three basic areas. Discover questions help us make sure we understand what the preacher is saying and see how it relates the Scriptures and the good news of Jesus. Nurture questions take us deeper than mere understanding and begin to ask if we really believe what we are learning? They open windows into the heart of each group member and

expose where we need to repent and re-root ourselves in Jesus. Apply questions get your group thinking about how all of this will influence and affect our lives going forward.³⁷

During Each Group Meeting:

So you've gone deeper with the sermon and now have your list of discussion questions and things. What next? How do you actually facilitate a group meeting?

- **Catch up for a few minutes.** One goal in discussing sermons as a group is that you might grow together in friendship and community. Don't be so set on getting to and through your sermon discussion that you actually neglect the people in your group! Leave space for organic connection and sharing.
- **Open in prayer.** Without God's intervention and help we will accomplish nothing.
- **Ask an icebreaker question.** You might consider beginning your discussion by asking a question to warm everyone up and get them talking. A good icebreaker question is related to the larger topic you'll be addressing, but often only tangentially. It is a question that's easy and fun to answer and serves the dual purpose of helping people ease into the awkward space of group discussion while also affording your group members the chance to learn more about one another.
- **Reread the sermon text.** Have a volunteer or two reread the Scripture that was studied on Sunday. This puts God's Word front and center and reminds everyone that He's the One you so desperately need to hear from.
- **Revisit the sermon's Big Idea and main points.** Take time to review the main points from the sermon to make sure that people who missed it are decently caught up and that people who already heard it are sufficiently reminded. This will serve as a backdrop to your discussion time and will hopefully help keep people on track.
- **Reflect on the sermon together.** Now is the time for bringing out those discussion questions you've prepared. Following the general progression of the sermon, focus in on certain verses, quotes, or points and ask questions off of them that move your group from Discover to Nurture to Apply. If you can, leave time at the end to ask your group if they wish to share any of their 3Qs. A lot of these will likely come out in your discussion time, but there may be some lingering items your members wish to address. Here's a basic guide to handling what they may share:
 - *Quotes:* They share something from the sermon that stood out to them and explain why. You ask questions to get deeper along the D-N-A pathway and then spin out further things for the whole group to reflect on.
 - *Questions:* They share something from the sermon that they don't fully understand. You first throw it back to them to see what they think. Then you expand it out to the

³⁷ You might consider trying to finalize these questions as early as possible so you can email them out to your group in advance of the gathering. This will give them more time to reflect, likely resulting in deeper, richer discussion when the time comes for it.

group for their thoughts. And then, perhaps, you try to help answer their question yourself. If you don't know, you commit to looking into it and circling back next time.

- *Quarrels*: They share something from the sermon that they don't fully agree with. You first make sure the quarrel is fully understood. Then you expand the matter out to the group to get their thoughts. Then you share your own heart on the matter and try to help. Remember, there are closed and open-handed issues! It's good and even healthy to struggle with things and disagree. You don't have to resolve it. Consider carrying on the conversation offline.
- **Set aside time to pray for one another.** Make space for people to share prayer requests and give personal updates. By the end here, in view of the discussion, you should already have a sense of specific ways you can be praying for each other. This just casts a net for anything else. Take notes. And take turns interceding. Encourage your group to keep praying for one another through the week.

After Each Group Meeting:

- **Keep the conversation going.** In the time between group meetings, you might consider ways to keep the conversation going. Perhaps you (or someone you assign) can send out a summary of the last meeting's discussion with any relevant action steps, prayer points, unanswered questions to research, etc. You may also reach out personally to people in your group on matters they asked for prayer or accountability for. The goal (as always!) is to keep your group engaging with Jesus and growing in His image and likeness!³⁸

³⁸ To see what a sample Sermon Discussion Study Guide might look like check out Appendix 3.

Appendix 3:

A Sample Sermon Discussion Study Guide

The following guide was created as a follow-up study of the sermon: "A Place at the Table: Rediscovering the Wonder of the Lord's Supper (Part 1)."³⁹

Icebreaker: If you're married, what meal did you serve up at your wedding reception? If you're not married, what meal would you serve up? Why do we often celebrate important events with a big meal?

Reread:

- Luke 22:14-23

Revisit:

- Big Idea:
 - Establishing and eating the Lord's Supper is one of the last things Jesus does with His disciples before His death. This alerts us to the fact that it is deeply significant to Him. But why? What does this meal mean for Jesus?
- Main Points:
 - Picture
 - Element #1: The Bread
 - Element #2: The Cup
 - Element #3: The Lamb?!
 - Promise
 - New Record
 - New Heart
 - New Relationship
 - New World
 - Plea

Reflect:

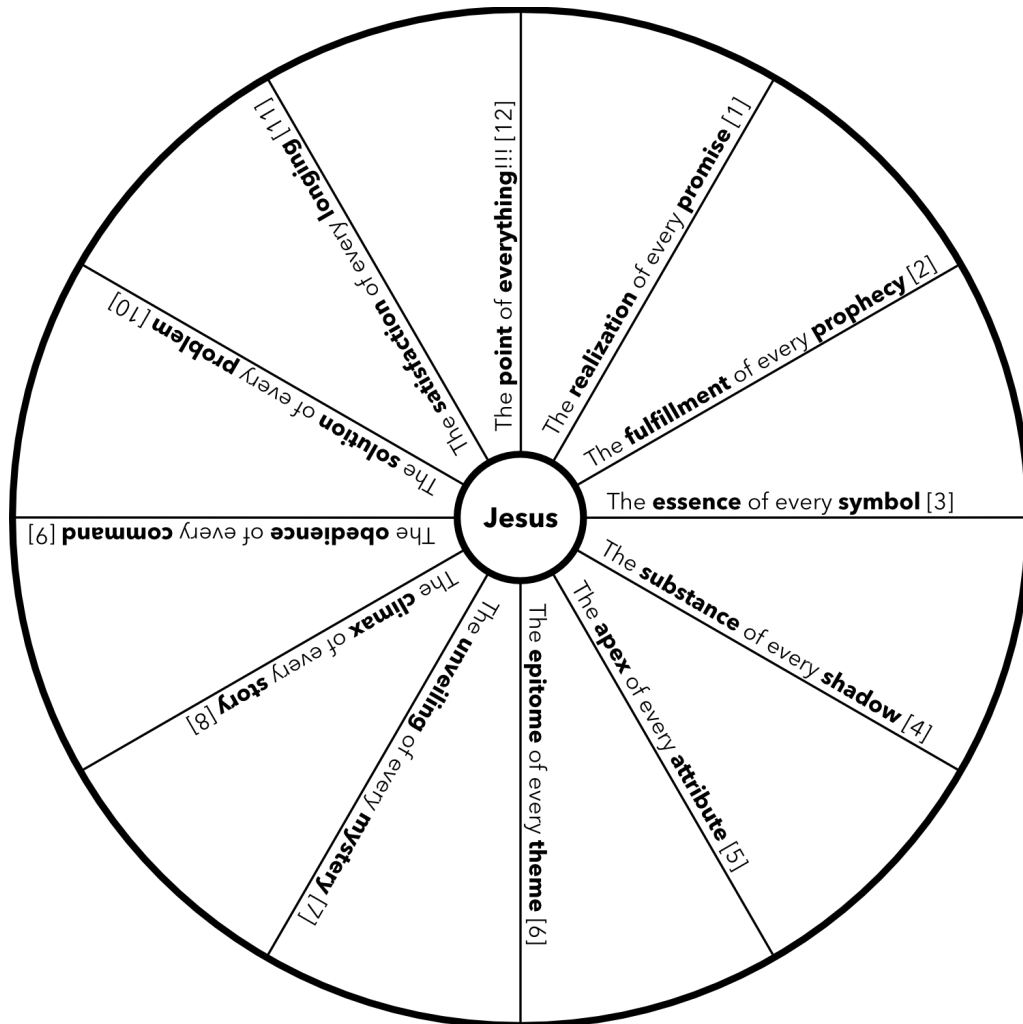
- Have you ever partaken of a Passover meal? How did that experience enrich your understanding of the gospel and the Lord's Supper?

³⁹ <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/a-place-at-the-table-rediscovering-the-wonder-of-the-lords-supper-part-1/>

- In v. 15 Jesus says to His disciples: "I have earnestly desired [Gk. = 'with desire I have desired'] to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Why is Jesus so excited about this meal do you think? Have you ever approached the Lord's Supper with this same kind of anticipation?
- How important is the Lord's Supper to you personally? If our church stopped celebrating Communion, what difference would it really make in your life or walk with Jesus?
- In the sermon, I mention how many churches seem to push this practice into the margins. In the various churches you've been a part of in the past, what did they do with the Lord's Supper? What was good? What was not so good? How can we improve our celebration of it at Mercy Hill?
- Read Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, 118-119 [reference quote]. What are your thoughts on this? What would it look like to incorporate more what Chester says here as a church and/or Home Group? What effect might this have on your spiritual life and relationship with Jesus and the church?
- In v. 20 Jesus says that the cup is the new covenant in His blood. He's referring to Jer 31:31-34 in particular. Read it. What most stands out to you here? What aspect of the New Covenant do you most need to hear and believe right now and why?
- In Jer 31:38-40 we see that this new covenant also contains a promise to bring in a new world. Jesus says that even the table of the Lord's Supper anticipates this banquet we shall enjoy in the coming kingdom of God. As Christians, why does our hope in the world that's to come make us the best possible citizens in the world now is? Think about what's dividing our country these days. How would being a "person of the table" influence the way you approach the matter? How does Jesus show us a better way?
- In v. 21 Jesus unveils the fact that one of the disciples at the table will betray Him. Why do you think Jesus doesn't explicitly call out Judas here?
- Think of the unbelievers in your life. What truths drawn out from our text would most minister to them and why?
- This was part one in dealing with the Lord's Supper. What other questions do you still have about the subject that you hope are addressed in part two?

Appendix 4: The Hub Diagram

"The gospel is not merely the starting line of a much longer race. It is more like the hub of a wheel. Without the gospel always at the center, nothing in the Christian life turns. Everything stalls out. You go nowhere."



[1] Cf. 2 Cor 1:20

[2] Cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12

[3] Cf. John 1:29; 2:18-22; 3:14-15

[4] Cf. Col 2:17; Heb 8:1-6; Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 10:4

[5] Cf. Heb 1:3; John 14:9

[6] Cf. Ps 118:22; Matt 21:42; Acts 4:11 on the theme of God exalting the rejected

[7] Cf. Col 1:25-27; Eph 3:8-9

[8] Cf. John 5:39; Luke 24:44-47

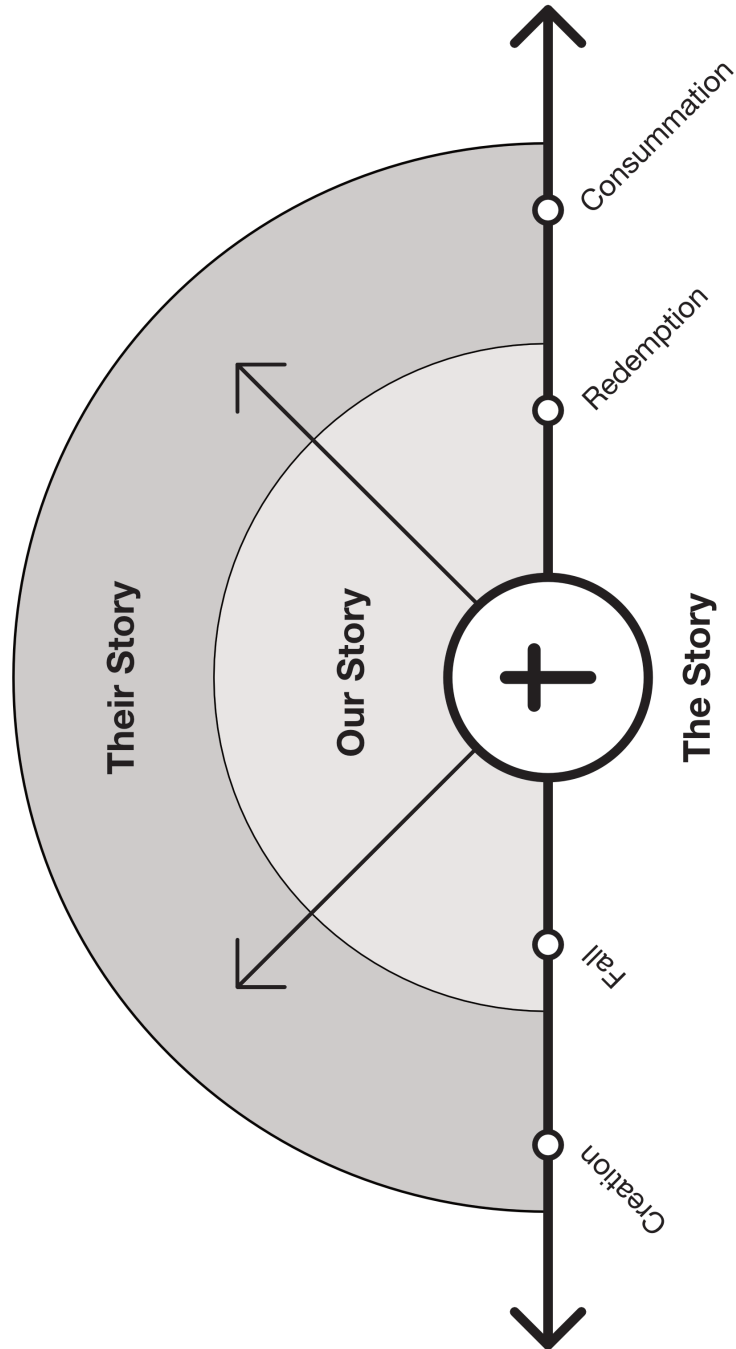
[9] Cf. Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 5:21; Matt 5:17

[10] Cf. Acts 4:12

[11] Cf. John 7:37-38; Matt 11:28

[12] Cf. John 5:39, 46; Col 1:15-20

Appendix 5: The Story Diagram



Appendix 6:

Don't Overcomplicate Evangelism

By Tony Merida

"If you build it, they will come."

I like the movie *Field of Dreams*, but it's a terrible evangelism strategy for church planters.

Most unbelievers have no interest in joining you this Sunday. Simply offering a "good product" isn't enough in this post-Christian world. It doesn't matter how cool your venue is, how good your music and coffee are, or how hip your pastor looks.

The unbelievers who do show up are there because someone has befriended and invited them *outside* the walls of a church building. Most outsiders aren't waking up saying, "I wonder if they have good coffee. I'm going to check it out." Or "I bet the music is great there. I should go visit."

As church-planting pastors, we have to overemphasize evangelism. It's a challenge for us to be both missional and also pastoral—a tension that exists from the founding of your church. One planter recently told me, "I just got started, and I already have shepherding issues."

But if a church is to flourish, evangelism must be central to the life of the body.

Models of Evangelism

In years past, two forms of evangelism have been most common: *event* evangelism and *cold-call* evangelism. Indeed, when people hear "evangelism" today, they often think of either big events/crusades or door-to-door outreach.

The Lord has used both of these approaches, and in some contexts, they continue to be effective. However, in other places—particularly in many post-Christian contexts—these approaches are often less fruitful.

I don't want to insinuate we should reject these approaches. We shouldn't. But I want to highlight another approach that has historic precedent—one that is both culturally appropriate and personally achievable: *network evangelism*.

Network evangelism isn't an event; it's not a program; it's not something you only do on Tuesday nights at 6 p.m. It's a lifestyle. It's about living with gospel intentionality in the everyday rhythms of life. It's done among the people who fall into your current web of relationships.

When planting a church, network evangelism becomes a practical way to emphasize how every member can live as a missionary.

In order to cultivate and sustain an evangelistic culture in our young church, I've preached a number of sermons on this topic. The first series came after the elders had a long discussion about why we weren't seeing more people converted. As I was praying and thinking about how to lead our people, I came across this statement in Tim Keller's *Church Planter Manual*: "There must be an atmosphere of expectation that every member will always have two to four people in the incubator, a force-field in which people are being prayed for, given literature, brought to church or other events." We've sought to expand and build on this idea.

Why Network Evangelism?

Network evangelism first recognizes the sovereignty of God. It develops a mindset that every person in our sphere of life matters, and it helps us remember that God has us living in this time and place in history, surrounded by particular image-bearers he has sovereignly put in our path (Acts 17:26).

Additionally, network evangelism has historic precedent. In his book *Cities of God*, sociologist Rodney Stark describes how Christianity became an urban movement that transformed the Roman world:

Social networks are the basic mechanism through which conversion takes place. . . . Most conversions are not produced by professional missionaries conveying a new message, but by rank-and-file members who share their faith with their friends and relatives. . . . The principle that conversions spread through social networks is quite consistent with the fact that the earliest followers of Jesus shared many family ties and long-standing associations. . . . Although the very first Christian converts in the West may have been by full-time missionaries, the conversion process soon became self-sustaining as new converts accepted the obligation to spread their faith and did so by missionizing their immediate circle of intimates.

Did you see that? The movement advanced because new converts accepted the obligation to spread the gospel within their own circles of everyday influence.

Further, network evangelism promotes faithfulness and patience. Evangelistic methods often involve only "on the spot" presentations. They can be impersonal as well. They can be about generating numbers, not valuing people. They can allow us to simply "check a box" to appease our guilt, and then move on.

But when you're reaching out to people you see regularly, it demands faithfulness and perseverance. You can do the necessary pre-evangelism, answer questions, slowly and gradually watch defenses go down, and hopefully—by God's grace—see your friend, family member, co-worker, or neighbor declare, "Jesus is Lord."

Who's in Your Networks?

We could organize our web of relationships in a variety of ways, but it has been helpful for our church to think within five categories:

1. **Familial Network**—people in your family.
2. **Geographical Network**—people in your neighborhood.
3. **Vocational Network**—people at your workplace.
4. **Recreational Network**—people you hang out with.
5. **Commercial Network**—people you see at shops.⁴⁰

We encouraged our church members to identify at least five people in each of these networks—or if they're low in one area, to increase the number of people in the other networks. And we've encouraged them to do one of five tasks:

1. **Pray for them**—You'll be surprised what happens when you begin to pray for the people in your path. You may experience the joy C. S. Lewis expressed: "I have two lists of names in my prayers, those for whose conversions I pray and those for whose conversions I give thanks. The little trickle of transferences from List A to List B is a great comfort."
2. **Invite them**—Invite them over to eat dinner, to play sports, to go to a movie, to come with you to a church event.
3. **Serve them**—Identify a way that you can bless those in your networks. Babysit for them, pick up groceries for them, cut their grass, and so on.
4. **Give resources to them**—Ask them to read a book or article with you, or to listen to a sermon or podcast. Discuss these resources with them.
5. **Share the gospel with them**—Look for various places where you can talk about your faith. Let your friend know you are part of a church, and see if they ask questions. Listen to their problems with real concern, and then seize the opportunity to address the problems with gospel hope. Share some of your own struggles, and talk about how you deal with them in light of your faith. Simply ask them what they believe, and just let them talk.

From this plan—five people in each of the five categories, doing one of the five tasks—we developed this evangelism card for individuals and small groups:

Network Evangelism
Pray. Invite. Give Literature. Serve. Share the Gospel.

Networks	People
Vocational	
Familial	
Geographical	
Commercial	
Recreational/Relational	

⁴⁰ About the only thing I would slightly modify in this article are the five network categories he provides here. I found there to be too many people I know that didn't quite fit one or the other. Instead, here are the five I would propose: (1) **Family**—people with whom you share a *common biology*; (2) **Friends**—people with whom you already hang out and share *common interests*; (3) **Coworkers**—people with whom you share a *common vocation* (e.g. Engineer, student, mother, etc.); (4) **Neighbors**—people with whom you share a *common geography*; (5) **Acquaintances**—people with whom you share a *common path* (e.g. those you run into at shops, the gym, your kid's school, the homeless woman you pass on the street, etc.).

May God use ordinary saints like us, who overflow with love for the Savior, to lead outsiders to faith as we live with gospel intentionality in our everyday networks.

Appendix 7:

Using Planning Center Groups

We use Planning Center Groups as a way of organizing and making visible all of Mercy Hill's Home Groups. Each Home Group Leader is responsible for updating their Planning Center group page. Our church website allows newcomers to check out potential groups to join, and we want to make sure everything is accurate and up to date.⁴¹

Planning Center Groups is a useful tool that allows you to send group messages and event reminders, attach resources, and more. It's totally up to you whether or not you'd like to use all the features, but we request that you at least have the following updated:⁴²

Once you sign in and access your group's page, there is a menu on the left to access the following:

Members

- Feel free to add the members of your group here. This will draw from our church member database. If someone is missing, please let us know.

Events

- Please schedule calendar events and provide descriptions or meeting links as needed. This helps newcomers know when your next meeting is!
- If you use a virtual meeting link, be sure to include it under 'location' when you edit an event (must be marked as virtual) and/or in the meeting description.

Settings

- *Basic Info:* Input your group's name, type, and meeting schedule (feel free to change day or time as needed).
- *Image:* Put an image of your family or the entire group if you'd like!
- *Tags:* Choose the appropriate tags. These help to describe your group's meeting day, frequency, stage of life, gender, etc.
- *Contact Person:* Make sure your email is up to date, and that you display your leader name publicly so newcomers can contact you as needed!
- *Group Description:* Feel free to include details on what your group is doing, curriculum, etc. Keep this updated and relevant!

If you have any questions about how to navigate and use Planning Center Groups, please do let us know. We're here to help!

⁴¹ Visit <https://mercyhillchurch.churchcenter.com/groups/home-groups> to see what this looks like on the front end.

⁴² See the following introduction article for help: <https://pcogroups.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360006319853-Introduction-to-Groups-for-Leaders>.